

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Verification

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In 1972 the U.S. and the Soviet Union, among others, reached agreement on an arms control agreement with the sweeping title, "Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and Their Destruction." We have gradually learned the spirit in which the Soviets pledged to destroy any bacteriological or toxin weapons they possessed.

After signing of the convention, U.S. intelligence analysts were puzzled by continued construction of structures they had previously identified on satellite photographs as biological weapons facilities—combining an-

you have at least 600 missiles, and each has three warheads. So you are talking about at least 1,800 nuclear weapons (though there are suspicions that many of the warheads are chemical rather than nuclear).

The SS-20 does not have quite enough range to be classed as an intercontinental missile and is usually thought of as a theater weapon in Europe. But it just happens that the SS-20 is the top two rocket stages of the intercontinental SS-16. Could the Soviets have some extra boosters around to convert SS-20s into SS-16s? We have no good idea; SALT makes no provisions for counting what comes off Soviet production lines. But after all, we're dealing with the people who developed "yellow rain."

Why, though, should the Soviets use up SS-20s useful for threatening Europe? If they're going to produce extra boosters, why not just produce more SS-16s? This is the world's only mobile intercontinental missile, splendidly suited for storage in warehouses or railroad tunnels. There has been a recent flap in the press over the SS-16, and it seems the Soviets have deployed some 20 to 40 of them, in fixed silos rather than on mobile launchers. But if they have produced 40, how many more came off the line for the warehouses or railroad tunnels? We have no firm idea. But we are dealing with the people who developed "yellow rain."

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"It violates no confidence for me to state, as vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, that our verification systems, being restored from losses sustained during the Iranian upheaval, give us high levels of confidence that the Soviets have been in general compliance with SALT I and, so far, with the SALT II agreement as well." So reads a recent letter in the New York Times from Senator Daniel P. Moynihan. But if we can't rule out entirely plausible scenarios under which the Soviets might have twice the number of ICBMs specified in SALT, how then can we have a "high level of confidence" that they have not violated SALT?

Because, dear reader, if the Soviets have a thousand extra missiles stored in warehouses and railroad tunnels, it does not violate SALT until they haul them out. Welcome to the wonderful world of verification.

Whither Arms Control?—II

An Editorial Series

imal pens and explosive assembly lines behind double fences. In 1979, we began to receive reports of an accident at one of these facilities, Military Compound No. 19, leading to an epidemic of anthrax near the Soviet city of Sverdlovsk. The reported symptoms indicated pulmonary anthrax, usually encountered only among workers in wool-sorting sheds. The Soviets said some ordinary anthrax had been caused by tainted meat and, though the convention obligated them to cooperate in any investigation of possible violations of the 1972 convention, they rebuffed all further inquiries.

Starting in 1976 and with increasing frequency in later years, Hmong refugees fleeing Laos told of "yellow rain," mists dropped from airplanes or spread by artillery shells that produced profuse bleeding and other bizarre symptoms. We now know that "yellow rain" contains trichothecene toxins derived from molds, banned under the 1972 convention. Poisoning from such toxins is exceedingly rare in most of the world, but was the cause of a stunning epidemic in the Orenburg region of the Soviet Union in the winter of 1943-1944. Afghan rebels fighting the Soviets also report poison gas attacks.

The cumulative evidence leads inescapably to the conclusion that the Soviets signed the biological weapons convention with every intention of violating it. They have proceeded with research, development and production of biological warfare agents, have tested them in remote battlefields and in fact have apparently adopted them as routine in some military situations. Presumably they agreed to the convention for propaganda purposes and

to inhibit any Western development of nuclear weapons. They approached this arms control measure, in short, with total cynicism and utter bad faith.

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In 1972, the U.S. and the Soviet Union also signed SALT I, which included a treaty limiting anti-missile systems and an interim agreement putting caps on intercontinental missiles and bombers and submarine-launched missiles. We now have to ask, what if the Soviets approached this 1972 agreement in the same spirit they approached the other one? What might they have done over the last decade?

For openers, we know the Soviets once had more than 900 intercontinental missiles in addition to those currently deployed under the SALT limits. These are the SS-7, SS-8, SS-9 and SS-11 missiles that have been replaced by more modern missiles over the life of the SALT agreements. Where are these 900 missiles today? We really have no idea.

The Soviet Union is a closed society, without Congress or Aviation Week peering over the generals' shoulders. Though it seems to be Soviet military habit never to throw away old weapons, SALT made no provision for supervising the destruction of deactivated missiles. Our space satellites do not have X-ray vision to peer through the roofs of warehouses (let alone into the numerous railroad tunnels in the Urals). The 900 deactivated missiles compare with 1,054 ICBMs the U.S. is allowed under SALT.

We could, of course, assume that the 900 missiles have somehow gone away. But it would seem to us far more prudent to assume that in any crisis they would be hauled out from somewhere and pointed at the U.S. After all, you're dealing with the people who developed "yellow rain."

Why, though, should the Soviets rely on old-fashioned missiles? In addition to the missiles they have deployed under SALT limits, they have also deployed the modern, mobile and highly accurate SS-20. The number usually given is 300, but this is the number of launchers, and in fact each launcher is routinely deployed with one missile and at least one reload. So

Verifying Soviet compliance with arms control agreements means, in effect, learning the most sensitive military secrets of a totalitarian society. Can we really bet our national security on doing this, even with space satellites and electronic eavesdropping? Or for that matter, even with on-site inspection? On-site inspection of how many sites? On-site inspection 24 hours a day? On-site inspection of possible hiding places for missiles produced before inspection? (While SALT-I concerned huge ICBMs, SALT-III would presumably also concern cruise missiles, which are 20 feet long.) Meaningful verification would mean freedom to inspect at will anywhere in the Soviet Union, which would mean the Soviet Union would have to stop being a totalitarian society.

In practice the answer to this dilemma has been to negotiate not about what is militarily meaningful, but about what is technically verifiable. Thus SALT-I limits "launchers"—concrete holes in the ground. It does not limit warheads or even missiles, which can kill people. This opens new avenues for the Soviets to breach the spirit of the treaty, but after a lot of internal debate our intelligence agencies tell us they can "verify" its letter. Because they can count the holes in the ground we are invited to feel safe.

Implicit in this, deny it as our negotiators always do, is an assumption of some minimum of Soviet good faith. Hard bargaining and even some cheating around the edges—this verification can handle. But it cannot handle a cynical and deliberate attempt to subvert arms control totally, to build a huge concealed military advantage. It cannot deal, in short, with the kind of behavior the Soviets have exhibited with "yellow rain."

Senator Moynihan's letter catches the point nicely, if perhaps unwittingly. "Can we trust the Soviets? May I offer Mr. Dooley's dictum on such questions: 'Trust 'Ivrybody but cut the cards.'" But this is not an after-office poker game. At this saloon they don't check the 'six-guns at the door. Someone may blackjack you and run off with the pot, or pull a knife or spike your drink with mycotoxins. But we venture bravely in, fix the Soviets with our firmest stare, and keep reminding ourselves to cut the cards.